

Donovan's Saga: Nine Out of Cuba

By Ralph Chapman
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

Another chapter in what may well become famous as the Donovan Saga was concluded yesterday with the arrival at Homestead Air Force Base, south of Miami, of nine Americans returned home after 67 days in the jails of Castro's Cuba.

Accused of spying for the Central Intelligence Agency, their release was arranged by James B. Donovan, the Brooklyn lawyer whose earlier negotiations had freed some 1,100 Cubans taken prisoner during the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

The latest returnees insist that they were on a fishing and skin-diving expedition when their 100-foot boat lost its rudder and went down in the vicinity of the Bahamas. The men were at sea five days in a lifeboat and finally drifted ashore on the Cuban coast.

"The Cuban government has informed me that it has determined, despite the suspicious circumstances of the case, the innocence of the expedition," Mr. Donovan told newsmen yesterday. "The fact that they were shipwrecked seamen has been established."

Hopes to Free Others

At the same time, he expressed optimism that he would obtain the release of 22 or 23 other Americans now imprisoned in Cuba on charges ranging from espionage to sabotage.

"On my next trip those Americans will come out," he insisted.

According to Mr. Donovan, the latest returnees were taken to Havana and then to the Hotel Nacional, where they were held incommunicado for several days. They were then taken to the Hotel Nacional and held incommunicado for several days. They were then taken to the Hotel Nacional and held incommunicado for several days.

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exhaustion but this was the worst.

The bearded Premier was perfectly willing to talk to Mr. Donovan but only on his own terms as to time and place. Some of the talks took place on the back seat of a limousine rocketing around the island. Others were held during short stops in Havana, Veradero Beach, Matanzas, the Bay of Pigs and Cardenas. "I would see him as I could," Mr. Donovan said.

Dogged Hunter

He did not bother to recount, although others did, those earlier trips last fall when, wracked by bursts and almost speechless from laryngitis, he literally haunted Castro until the Bay of Pigs prisoner exchange was arranged. He said nothing about how he killed whatever chance he may have had as Democratic candidate for the U. S. Senate from New York by interrupting his campaign to seek Castro out in what he has referred to as "that rotting paradise."

Neither did he mention the fact that all these endeavors brought him not a penny in fees while cutting seriously into his highly successful practice of corporation law.

Asked once why he got himself involved in such things as the defense of Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, the Soviet spy, or Abel's exchange for the U-2 pilot, Francis Gary Powers, or these latest Caribbean adventures, he said: "I don't know. I swear to God, I just don't know."

Courteous Dictator

Of the Cuban dictator, he said: "Castro has always been very courteous and he was this time."

The fishing expedition was led by Jack Browne of Miami, but it was his second in command, Robert C. Moran of Lockport, N. Y., who in Florida yesterday recounted the events that

saw in Miami on Jan. 20 in the converted buoy tender "Shrub." They were headed for fishing waters off the Dominican when their ship went down.

"We got off in a whale boat," Mr. Moran said. "We drifted in it five nights."

The boat went ashore near Meritas. The men were picked up and taken to secret police headquarters in Havana where they were subjected to a series of interrogations.

"It was about the second day that they pulled the spy stuff on us," Mr. Moran continued. "After that they tried a lot of things like putting Cuban stooges into the cell with us to try and find out something. We were there 67 days and in solitary confinement for 43 days."

"Man, it's good to be back. Rice and beans was all we ever had to eat and that stuff never did agree with me."

"They tried to convert my boys to communism," added Mr. Browne.

He said that they knew Mr. Donovan was working for their release but did not explain how they gained this knowledge.